CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND SIXTY-EIGHTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva
on Thursday, 19 June 1997, at 10 a.m.

President: Mrs. Diallo (Senegal)

GE.97-61964 (E)

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I declare open the 768th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Allow me first of all to extend a warm welcome, on behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf, to Her Excellency Mrs. Zdenka Kramplová, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Slovakia, who will be our first speaker today. Mrs. Kramplová has occupied senior positions in her Government. Inter alia, she has served as Secretary-General of the Government of the Slovak Republic and Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and she has very recently been appointed her country's Minister for Foreign Affairs. That the Minister for Foreign Affairs felt it useful to come to address the Conference so soon after taking up her important functions, and a few days before the presidency of the Conference falls to the Ambassador of Slovakia, is certainly a sign of the deep interest which her country has in our Conference and in the multilateral approach to disarmament. I am sure that we shall all be following her statement with the greatest of interest.

Apart from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Slovakia, on the list of speakers for today I have the representatives of Italy and Mexico. Once we have reached the end of the list of speakers, it is my intention to suspend this plenary meeting for one hour in order to enable the various groups to meet, and I wish to tell you the rooms in which the groups will be meeting. The Western Group will meet in room 1, the Group of 21 here in this room and the Eastern European Group in room C.108. I would now like to invite the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Slovakia, Her Excellency Mrs. Kramplová, to take the floor.

Mrs. KRAMPLOVÁ (Slovakia): It is a great honour for me to address this important forum today. The Conference on Disarmament (CD) has many times in history demonstrated its utility and significance in the field of disarmament. The importance the Slovak Republic attaches to the Conference on Disarmament is underlined by my first official visit abroad in the position of Minister for Foreign Affairs. It is a symbol of the emphasis that my country places on the issues of international security, stability, peace, arms control and disarmament. The history of the last 50 years has unequivocally proved that the United Nations Organization has been an irreplaceable institution contributing to the solution of these questions. The Conference on Disarmament and its predecessors that belong to the large United Nations family has gained a great reputation by its expertise, perseverance and mainly by its achievements.

Let me recall that today one year has elapsed since the Conference on Disarmament took the decision to expand its membership by 23 countries, including the Slovak Republic. Therefore, my address today is an historic one as it is for the first time that a high-level political representative of the Slovak Republic is delivering its views as a full member. We have accepted the resolution in the matter of our status within the CD not only with satisfaction but also with awareness of the related responsibility. We are convinced that the expansion of the membership has been beneficial to the Conference on Disarmament itself. It has meant an increase in its

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representativeness, legitimacy and consequently its credibility in the new geopolitical environment. Based on this principle, Slovakia believes that the Conference should be open to all countries wishing to join it.

It is an indisputable fact that the Conference on Disarmament has been strongly interconnected with the development of the international situation. The end of the cold war has brought relief in tension and subsequent considerable improvement of the international climate. The Conference on Disarmament has found itself in a totally new situation that neither the Conference itself nor its predecessors had been able to enjoy. It has managed to make use of the available opportunity. The Conference successfully elaborated and completed the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) that entered into force only a few weeks ago. The Slovak Republic was also a party to the elaboration of this first international norm that will enable the elimination of one whole category of weapons of mass destruction. The signature of the CWC in January 1993 was one of the very first acts of the Slovak Republic in the international community. My country is highly committed to the successful operation of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Slovakia has underlined this commitment by providing facilities for the training of OPCW inspectors and is prepared to continue being active in this field. It is in our interest that the OPCW be as effective an organization as possible. Therefore, we deem it inevitable that the number of its members be expeditiously increased to the greatest possible extent.

In the last years the Conference on Disarmament has reached another important achievement in the field of nuclear weapons. The completion and adoption of the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) meant the fulfilment of a more than 40-year-old dream. Its importance was confirmed by the unequivocal support it received at the fifty-first session of the United Nations General Assembly. We perceive the adoption of the CTBT by the United Nations General Assembly as a significant success of the Conference on Disarmament and the entire international community. It is a logical and important step to develop the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) towards the common final goal - nuclear disarmament. We are convinced that accession to the nuclear test ban is in the interest of all States that support the process of nuclear disarmament.

The Slovak Republic does not only observe with satisfaction the process of the forming of the CTBT verification mechanism and the relevant organization in Vienna, but it fully participates in these activities through the chairmanship of the second Preparatory Commission for the CTBTO.

I cannot fail to mention the unlimited extension of the NPT and the encouraging results of the recent first PrepCom session of the NPT Review Conference scheduled for the year 2000.

We also welcome the encouraging statements by the Presidents of the United States and the Russian Federation given at their recent meeting in Helsinki. The confirmation of their intention to strengthen stability, arms control and disarmament and the intended further reduction of strategic arms has been welcomed with satisfaction by the whole international community.

(Mrs. Kramplová, Slovakia)

While referring to the above-mentioned achievements and progress, it would be an omission not to touch upon the effort to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention. The discussions of the Ad Hoc Group on the concrete text of a legally binding verification mechanism that are to take place next month here in Geneva can undoubtedly be considered as the end of one stage and the beginning of a new, qualitatively higher stage.

The above-mentioned achievements prove that a favourable international political environment continues to exist. On the one hand this fact is satisfying, on the other hand, it obliges us to undertake further work and achieve further success. However, nowadays the Conference on Disarmament does not seem to be making full use of the opportunities offered to it, and continues to hesitate. It is understandable that after finishing the important stage of work on the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty, some time is needed for analysis, reflection and the defining of new tasks. Nevertheless, it is highly important to maintain the existing momentum and to continue its dynamic development. The Conference on Disarmament has a great role to play in this process. Its inability to adapt to new tasks and to find effective solutions could undermine its position in the international mechanism in the area of arms control and disarmament.

We regard it as highly important that the Conference on Disarmament should keep on playing an irreplaceable role in solving the most fundamental issues. In the global context we have in mind threats resulting from uncontrolled proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Therefore, in the nuclear field, the next logical assignment of the Conference on Disarmament should be work on the prohibition of the production of fissile materials for weapons and other explosive devices. The adoption of such a prohibition would first of all change the de facto moratoria adopted by several nuclear Powers to a legally binding obligation. Moreover, it would preclude the illegal proliferation of nuclear weapons and materials. Such a prohibition cannot fail to satisfy the interests of all countries which are active in this aspect of the disarmament process. The door leading to the start of work has been opened thanks to the CD decision in 1995. The opening of concrete negotiations has thus become only a technical question. The Slovak Republic is prepared to commence substantive work immediately.

Nuclear disarmament is only one of the disarmament issues that mankind faces in this era. The statistical data on the number of victims of conventional weapons only confirm this claim. The Conference is the only multilateral body able to effectively negotiate disarmament treaties. Therefore, it must adopt a very balanced approach to the complex set of disarmament and arms control problems. Its agenda cannot overlook the conventional aspect. This category of weapons includes anti-personnel landmines, on which international society has focused its attention in the second half of this decade. This problem is a very serious and intricate one. It brings together humanitarian and disarmament elements. It was the fear engendered by the growing humanitarian crises caused by uncontrolled proliferation of anti-personnel mines that led the States parties to the Certain Conventional Weapons Convention (CCW) to strengthen its Protocol II, which sets the rules in this field. This process must be accompanied by a

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coordinated effort aimed at achieving its universality. The Slovak Republic has been actively involved in these negotiations and at present it is preparing to ratify the Protocol.

However, the strengthening of Protocol II can neither fully meet the expectations of the international community nor can it halt or slow down the escalation of the humanitarian crisis. What are possible solutions then? One way is to adopt relevant decisions and appropriate measures at the national level. Slovakia ranks among those States that pursue the ultimate elimination of anti-personnel mines. In 1994 my country adopted an indefinite moratorium on the import, export and transfer of all types of this category of weapons. Let me add that Slovakia does not develop and produce anti-personnel landmines.

Further answers to my question depend on the approach taken to the complex issue of mines. A number of countries perceive the problem of anti-personnel mines mainly as a serious humanitarian issue. This understanding of the problem gave rise to the international initiative widely known as the Ottawa Process. The Slovak Republic has been actively involved in this process from its inception and is intent on maintaining an active part in it. The existing humanitarian crisis can only be solved by radical action that will ban the production, stockpiling, operational use and transfer of anti-personnel mines. We support this objective set by the Ottawa Process. The purpose of creating such an international norm will also be to serve as a moral and political example and incentive for those countries which do not feel prepared to accede to a comprehensive ban at this stage.

The other aspect of this issue is the disarmament aspect. In the solution of these questions, the Conference on Disarmament has fully proved itself by its representativeness and credibility. The advantage of the Conference on Disarmament is embodied in the fact that its results have a global character and are widely supported. This balances the relative slowness and procedural complexity of CD work. We therefore regard the suggestion to open negotiations leading to an eventual ban on anti-personnel mines through talks on the prohibition of transfers as very rational.

The Slovak Republic is prepared to support all forums and ways that can contribute to effective resolution of the anti-personnel mines issue. It is the principle of complementarity that leads us to endorse progress in both the main forums - the Ottawa Process and the Conference on Disarmament.

Since the beginning of this year the Conference on Disarmament has experienced some problems related to its concrete work programme. Let me express our hope that these difficulties will soon be overcome. The Conference on Disarmament cannot waste the opportunities available. The Slovak Republic is ready to contribute to its success. I hope that success for the Conference on Disarmament will result from our common effort and work. We will seek your support especially during the period when Slovakia will assume the responsible and honourable function of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament in a few days.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank Her Excellency Mrs. Kramplová, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Slovakia, for her important statement. I now give the floor to the representative of Italy, Ambassador Balboni Acqua.

Mr. BALBONI ACQUA (Italy): Since this is the first time I am formally addressing this assembly, which, as is so often recalled, is the only multilateral negotiating forum dealing with disarmament affairs, I wish to share with you some thoughts and evaluations on the present state of our activities. First of all, let me express my congratulations for the interesting intervention of the Slovak Foreign Minister, Madam Kramplová, representing a country with which Italy entertains the most cordial relations. May I also address to you Madam President my great appreciation for the style with which you have presided over our deliberations and the efforts you have exerted in accomplishing this difficult task? I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those colleagues who, in recent weeks, have addressed to me such warm words of welcome, and which I now, in turn, wish to address to the German Ambassador, Günther Seibert, who assumed his new functions in this post just a few weeks after me.

For Italy, the issue of disarmament has always been one of absolute priority, especially in the aftermath of such historic events as the end of the cold war, and on the eve of a new millennium, a new era where the problems of stability and security are destined to assume an ever greater predominant significance. The achievements in this forum in recent years are very well known to us all, and of particular importance are the conclusions of fundamental negotiations for greater global security, such as the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). It is therefore understandable that for someone like myself, a newcomer to the activities of this Conference, the present stalemate in our work, notwithstanding the successes already achieved and the projected activities generally recognized as urgent, could give rise to some deep perplexities. The Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Lamberto Dini, when taking part in the inaugural debate of the present session, did not fail to address a fervent appeal to all member countries to overcome ideological confrontations and other prejudiced attitudes which seem to be the basic obstacles to fruitful development of our activity. In fact, it should be evident that in our forum, political realism and a diplomatic approach constitute the fundamental essence of any aim and, consequently it would be advisable, albeit without denying the full respect of each national position, that adequate room be left for a free comparison of different theses in order to find a minimum common denominator on which the best solution for the successful attainment of our endeavours can be arrived at.

Linkages and cross-vetoes are not conducive to positive results. Dialogue is the essential instrument of our work. This assertion is eloquently supported by the Wolof saying, quoted in the literary works of that great statesman and well-known writer much appreciated in my country, Léopold Sédar Senghor, that "quand on commence par le dialogue, l'on aboutit à une solution".

(Mr. Balboni Acqua, Italy)

On 5 June, we listened to the important intervention by the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, Evgeny Primakov, and we were able to take note of his satisfaction at the agreement reached between the Russian Federation and the Atlantic Alliance. This historic document has, very rightly, been recorded as a "Founding Act". In fact, both the Atlantic Alliance and the Russian Federation for a long time have been reducing their respective arsenals, which were overburdened by the accumulation of armaments in the "arms race" of the last decades, and they are now following the reverse path on which nuclear strategy was built. We have gone from coexistence to cooperation and partial integration, adhering to those far-sighted perspectives so well expressed by Abraham Lincoln at the end of the American Civil War: "Grudge for nobody, generosity for everybody". Peace in our world is now, more and more, entrusted to complex structures, one of which is the solid understanding just attained and codified between the Atlantic Alliance and the Russian Federation. Nevertheless, taking advantage of the said achievements, we must not overlook the sources of persistent tension in other geographical areas.

Italy takes its place, without any hesitation whatsoever, among the countries who support the process of nuclear disarmament with is final goal of achieving the complete elimination of all such armaments. We already undertook steps in that direction in the past, assuming our full responsibility, and we understand the impatient expectations of some countries in this forum for concrete progress on that path. Nevertheless, we are convinced that no positive results can be attained just through declaratory good intentions and take-it-or-leave-it attitudes. This is why - and I am referring to the words of the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Lamberto Dini - we urge everyone to be specific and to embark on negotiations for which we feel, along with others, that the time is now ripe. I am referring to a convention banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices ("cut-off") and to the resumption of negotiations in this field. It is inconceivable to permit fissile materials to be manufactured while nuclear tests are being banned and existing fissile material is being destroyed. It would be an historical contradiction! But "cut-off" is only the first of a series of measures set out in the "Principles and objectives" document agreed on at the Review and Extension Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In the view of the Italian Government this document is itself a plan of action for nuclear disarmament over the next few years. Some of the most promising goals that still lie ahead are the following: consolidating and extending the denuclearized zones, especially in areas of tension; strengthening negative and positive security assurances to benefit States that fully comply with the provisions of the Non-Proliferation Treaty; extending and enhancing the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards in order to detect and prevent more effectively any possible undeclared nuclear activity.

Another indisputable objective of the action of the Conference concerns conventional disarmament. In this regard, the initiative for the prohibition of anti-personnel landmines has acquired, in these last months, due also to the impetus of the Ottawa exercise, an eloquent meaning. Italy, which intends to give the Ottawa exercise its full support, taking due account of its humanitarian value, cannot, at the same time, overlook the opportunity of

political solutions to be negotiated in this forum, which should not exclude a gradual and global implementation of certain principles already accepted in selected and advanced groups of countries. That is what we mean by complementarity between the two processes in question.

The undeniable implications of a strategic and military character, and the connected exigencies for security, amply justify the urgency for the direct involvement of the Conference in the debate on the ban on anti-personnel landmines. In this connection, I am pleased to inform this assembly that, on the occasion of the meeting of the Italian Council of Ministers on 13 June, my Government decided to renounce the operational use of anti-personnel landmines. This measure reinforces the one previously taken concerning the prohibition of production and export of these devices and the procedures for their destruction. I have asked the secretariat of the Conference on Disarmament to kindly issue this decision as an official document of the Conference for distribution to member States. With this further unilateral step towards the banning of these devices, Italy intends to reaffirm its commitment to the achievement of a legally binding international agreement banning anti-personnel landmines. Italy will therefore be present at the Brussels Conference of 24-27 June as a fully-fledged participant.

On this occasion, I would also like to say a few words on the subject of the rules of procedure of this Conference. I have noted some perplexities on the effectiveness of these rules, which at times seem to create obstacles instead of facilitating our work. The rules of 7 September 1994 mention, in annex I, the presence of 38 member States, whereas today the member States are nearly double that number, and we are all aware that more than 20 other countries are awaiting their admission, for which Italy has often reiterated its support. I am persuaded that the uneasiness which we perceive in the progress of our activity should be seen as the consequence of an increasing desire for a better quality and a greater usefulness of our debate. In other words, a more profitable and efficient progress of our work. We would therefore be inclined to reconsider this subject, together with all other interested delegations. The interna corporis are essential components of the concept of democracy and sovereignty in any assembly. They give the measure of its independence in the management of its activity and they are valuable only if they concur with the expression, internally and externally, of its decision-making effectiveness.

Italy, as one of its founding members, looks on the activities of this Conference with great hope and confidence. Nevertheless, my Government will not accept indefinitely the perpetuation of unproductive stalemates. We need to reinstate the negotiating process which should realistically take account of the limits of our action. This is the approach which has enabled us to reach important results in even more difficult political situations.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of Italy, Ambassador Balboni Acqua, for his statement and the kinds words addressed to the Chair. I give the floor to the representative of Mexico, Ambassador de Icaza.

Mr. de ICAZA (Mexico) (translated from Spanish): At the last plenary meeting of this Conference, on 12 June, a group of delegations tried to impose a decision whereby the Conference on Disarmament would deal with the subject of anti-personnel landmines and would even hold consultations on a negotiating mandate in the Conference, despite the fact that in the informal consultations it had become clear that there was no consensus for such a proposal. The delegation of Mexico opposed this attempt. This opposition was misrepresented in some cases and misconstrued in others. I am taking the floor today in the hope of fully clarifying our position.

The untruth that Mexico does not wish to have a ban on mines has been spread in bad faith. In September 1995, at the commencement of the Conference held in Vienna to review the 1980 Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Conventional Weapons, I said (you will forgive me for quoting myself) that Mexico's basic position has been that the final solution is to secure a complete ban on the use, development, production, storage and transfer of mines. Any prohibition or restriction of lesser scope would not provide any solution to the problem of those weapons, which are fundamentally indiscriminate and should be banned once and for all.

In October 1996, Mexico participated in the International Strategy Conference held in the city of Ottawa, and signed the declaration entitled "Towards a global ban on anti-personnel mines". Mexico is participating in and promoting the Ottawa Process to conclude before the end of this year a binding international agreement to ban anti-personnel landmines. Next week Mexico will be participating in the Brussels conference, an important phase in this process which will give countries an opportunity to commit themselves to a total ban on anti-personnel landmines. Mexico will be amongst those that enter into this commitment. In addition, on 17 February this year, the Government of Mexico issued a declaration of principles on the production, export and use of anti-personnel landmines. I will quote the principal paragraphs of that declaration.

> "The Government of Mexico considers that the use of this type of weapon constitutes a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and that the only real solution to the problems that it poses is the total abolition of anti-personnel landmines and the destruction of existing stockpiles.
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> "The Government of Mexico does not produce or import anti-personnel landmines and maintains strict and constant surveillance of Mexican firms or companies which use explosive material and does not grant any permits for the production of anti-personnel landmines.
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> "Mexico is among the countries which endorsed the need to make progress as fast as possible towards the prohibition of such weapons in all its aspects, and accordingly it calls upon Governments to accede to and/or ratify, as the case may be, the 1980 United Nations Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May be Deemed Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects, and its Protocols".

(Mr. de Icaza, Mexico)

The thrust of this declaration was made known to the Conference in the statement I delivered on 6 March this year.

Lastly, just a fortnight ago in the plenary of 5 June, the Group of 21, to which Mexico has the honour to belong, proposed a programme of work, the second paragraph of which suggested the appointment of a special coordinator to collect the views of the members of the Conference on agenda item 6, "Comprehensive programme of disarmament", with special reference to the subject of anti-personnel landmines. We could hardly have submitted this proposal if, on our part, there had been total rejection of the idea of consultations on the subject. So I think there is no doubt about our position. We suspect that it is distorted by those who do not share it, those who oppose a total ban on anti-personnel landmines. In my statement of 6 March I made it perfectly clear that Mexico is not convinced that the Conference on Disarmament is the appropriate forum for concluding as soon as possible negotiations on an agreement to ban the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines, in response to the United Nations General Assembly's appeal to all States in resolution 51/45 S, which Mexico of course co-sponsored, and which did not ask this Conference to undertake such negotiations.

The reasons for our doubts are few in number but conclusive. First of all, restrictions or prohibitions on conventional weapons which are excessively injurious or have indiscriminate effects belong to the field of international humanitarian law in general and to the sphere of the 1980 Convention in particular. Open-ended processes are characteristic of the reaffirmation and development of international humanitarian law. The Ottawa Process is one of these processes, and the most appropriate for attaining the objective we have set ourselves. Secondly, the Conference on Disarmament has other priorities, and other objectives. The priorities in the field of disarmament are weapons of mass destruction, beginning with nuclear weapons, and the reduction of conventional forces and weapons so that their excessive accumulation will not endanger security and international peace. Thirdly, even allowing, though not conceding, that issues of international humanitarian law should be negotiated in the Conference on Disarmament, our methods of work do not guarantee that we will attain the aim of totally abolishing anti-personnel landmines with the speed required by international public opinion because more than 25,000 innocent people are falling victim to these indiscriminate weapons each year.

Certainly we would not oppose consultations being held with a view to seeing whether there is consensus about a mandate to ban anti-personnel landmines through a legally binding agreement. This would not imply that the Conference has decided to hold negotiations on anti-personnel landmines, still less that it has decided to establish an institutional arrangement to commence negotiations on any aspect of the mines problem. It would merely mean that consultations would be held on the possibility of reaching agreement on a mandate that, for Mexico, could only relate to a total and immediate ban on mines. Nor would these consultations mean that the Conference has agreed that subjects belonging to the humanitarian sphere fall in its purview, still less that only those subjects should be worked on in this sole multilateral negotiating forum for disarmament.

(Mr. de Icaza, Mexico)

Let us remember that, while in the field of disarmament we start from the supposition that peace must be preserved, in the humanitarian sphere we work with the reality that armed conflicts do exist. Let us also remember that negotiations in the field of disarmament call for the requirements of the security of States to be balanced against the need to preserve international security, whereas negotiations in the humanitarian sphere require the military need to neutralize the enemy to be balanced with the need to protect non-combatants. Finally, let us remember that in the area of disarmament our aim is to eliminate weapons of mass destruction and reduce conventional forces and weapons, and that in the humanitarian sphere we are pursuing the goal of ensuring that human rights prevail, even in the context of armed conflict.

We are certainly concerned about a school of opinion according to which the end of the cold war has reduced the urgency of and need for efforts to bring about disarmament and in particular to ban nuclear weapons, and that the international community should change its priorities on the subject. We do not share that view. It is not shared by the International Court of Justice, which on 8 July last affirmed the existence of an obligation to negotiate and bring to a conclusion negotiations on nuclear disarmament, and that this is an obligation for all States. If we succeed in reaching agreement to hold consultations on a negotiating mandate in the Conference on Disarmament for the total and immediate prohibition of mines, we must simultaneously intensify our efforts to establish a programme of work and negotiating mechanisms on the subjects that really do belong on the agenda of the Conference. Last week the delegation of Mexico, on behalf of 26 delegations, submitted a draft mandate for an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament. We would like this proposal to be considered seriously by the Conference.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of Mexico, Ambassador de Icaza, for his statement. I have no more speakers on today's list. Are there any other delegations which would like to take the floor at this stage? None do. As I indicated at the beginning of this meeting, I am going to suspend the plenary for one hour so that the various groups can meet. I would like to invite the four coordinators to meet me in the Salon français at 12.15 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 11.05 a.m. and resumed at 1.05 p.m.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): The 768th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament is resumed.

As you know, I had suspended the plenary this morning in order to allow for consultations within the various groups. I have just held a session of Presidential consultations with the four coordinators concerning the draft decision on the appointment of a special coordinator on anti-personnel landmines, on the basis of the document of 22 May. It has emerged from these consultations that several delegations, in the various groups, have asked for time to consult their capitals and obtain instructions on this new draft decision. I shall keep the next President abreast of the situation.

Australia is asking for the floor. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. CAMPBELL (Australia): I am sorry to take the floor as you are about to close the session, Madam, but before you do, I think it is important that we take one decision, and that is this: I would like to table a formal proposal on the question of the appointment of a special coordinator for landmines, which I understand has been the subject of these informal consultations. I shall give the text of the proposal to Mr. Bensmail and would ask that it be circulated as an official document of the CD. As that will take some time, perhaps I should take a moment just to briefly read out that proposal so it is clear to all what it is that I am putting forward. The proposal is:

"Draft decision

"Without prejudice to, and within the context of, its urgent ongoing efforts to establish a programme of work for its 1997 session and to set up mechanisms, as appropriate, for other agenda items of the Conference, and in order to facilitate these efforts, the Conference on Disarmament decides:

"1. To appoint a special coordinator to conduct consultations on a possible mandate on the question of anti-personnel landmines under agenda item 6.

"2. The special coordinator shall take into consideration all relevant proposals and views, present and future.

"3. The special coordinator shall present an early report to the Conference on Disarmament."

The Australian delegation would hope that you would take the earliest possible opportunity to have the Conference pronounce on this proposal.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the Ambassador of Australia for this proposal. The secretariat has taken due note of the proposal and will do everything necessary to ensure that this draft decision can be distributed as rapidly as possible. I give the floor to the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. NASSERI (Islamic Republic of Iran): I have to apologize. I know the hour is late, and you are about to close the meeting. Nevertheless, based on the information we have received as far as yesterday's Presidential consultations are concerned, the President apparently intended to hold informal Presidential consultations to discuss all proposals. I am not certain whether that is something still being considered or whether we will have those informal consultations between now and next week. It was suggested to start them this afternoon - or shall we just wait for instructions? I know the situation is frustrating, but nevertheless my delegation believes that we must continue consultations in a manner in which we will be kept aware of any developments that may take place. Otherwise, we will just be in a wait-and-see situation until next week, which may not be the most appropriate way to proceed.

Mr. de ICAZA (Mexico) (translated from Spanish): Just to put on record that, as I announced in my statement today, my delegation would accept the decision in the terms that have just been read out by the representative of Australia.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of Mexico.

I would like to answer the question raised by the representative of Iran. Open-ended informal consultations were being considered, but the Presidential consultations that I held at 12.30 unfortunately did not lead to agreement among all the groups to hold these unofficial open-ended consultations. One group felt that, as the consultations were to allow us to take into consideration all the drafts before the Conference, including the new draft decision circulated this morning, it could not agree that open-ended unofficial consultations could be held under the circumstances.

I am now coming to the end of my term as President of the Conference on Disarmament. When I took on these functions I was aware of the immensity and the complexity of the task on which I was embarking with apprehension, but also with the profound feeling that we were all determined to spare no effort to emerge from the deadlock. The difficulties we had encountered in drawing up the agenda of the Conference at the beginning of our session certainly gave us grounds for thinking that agreement on a balanced programme of work giving equal prominence to the interests, concerns and priorities of everyone would be difficult. However, all the praiseworthy efforts of my two predecessors to this end were unsuccessful. I myself made a modest attempt to find ways and means to bring the Conference out of the current deadlock, and to ensure that we could finally get down to our substantive work. Unfortunately all attempts to open the way to wisdom and to create the conditions for a balanced and measured approach to our programme of work have thus far proved fruitless. At times we thought that we could blame our difficulties on the rigidities of the Conference and what was deemed to be the untransparent process of consultations among the various groups in the Conference. But we must acknowledge that neither the open-ended informal consultations nor the discussions in plenary have brought any more clarity or transparency to our discussions, and have sometimes even contributed to making positions more rigid. I will therefore not surprise anybody when I say that it is not so much our established working methods and procedures which hinder progress, but rather the persistence of fundamental differences concerning the priorities attached by the different parties to the items on the agenda of the Conference, even in a context which is at last free of the influence of the cold war.

Before I conclude, I would like to express my gratitude to all of you for your encouragement and your support. My thanks go, in particular, to the coordinators of the groups and the representative of China for the cooperation they have displayed during my term. My task was greatly facilitated by the entire team of the secretariat of the Conference and the interpreters, under the authority of our Secretary-General, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, and I would like to pay tribute to them for their devotion and efficiency. The assistance of the Deputy Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail,

(The President)

has been very valuable to me. I have been able to appreciate his competence, his integrity, his deep knowledge of issues and procedures and his unlimited readiness to help. May these words serve to reflect the extent of my gratitude.

It remains for me only to wish my successor in this post, Ambassador Mária Krasnohorská, much success and to promise her my full cooperation in her task.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will take place on Thursday, 26 June at 10 a.m. Before I adjourn the meeting I would like to inform you that the Group of 21 will be meeting in this room at 3.30 p.m. with interpretation.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.